

7-066 1966 Correspondence

John Brun - Gratian Puxon

Nov 6 Meeting

John Brun
6 Vale Lodge
Perry Vale

London S.E.23

23.10.66

Dear Gratian,

Thank you for your letter. I have tried to fix us up at Peter Kennedy's place but his wife is ill & so it was no go. I don't know of any other suitable place for a meeting on November 6th. For the big meeting on December 10th I shall see Cecil Sharp House about the possible booking of one of their big halls in the basement.

I think it would be a good idea to exclude travellers from our initial meeting on the 6th November. It strikes me that we will be able to talk more freely about the particular problems of forming an association including all travellers in Great Britain & Ireland. As I see it the travellers in this country are a more varied group than either in Ireland or on the Continent and I would have been greatly surprised if Gypsy Williams

and Romany Rye had reacted differently towards any proposition of yours. In the first place, when forming such an association, one would have to concentrate on recruiting the kind of travellers which would be socially acceptable in the average middle class home - people like the Coopers (in Edinburgh?), the Strangers in Cambridge; Fred Wood and his family; Solly Brown, possibly the Bynals; in St Pauls Bay and Robert Johnson in Edinburgh. There are known as "pure bred Romanies". Other social groupings in England are known as Bidikran, Pickers, Mummers of Hedgering and firmers (Scots, Irish and foreign Romanies). A Romany is someone who lives according to a code - rules of cleanliness, a minimum degree of honesty etc., an outsider who lives the code may on rare occasions be accepted into a Romany tribe. His children are post-rats (half breeds) but are

nonetheless classed as pure bred Romanies.²
But if a Romany marries a non Romany
who is not accepted by the tribe he
is disowned by his tribe forthwith.
He will never be forgiven. If he
remains on the road it will be ~~as~~
as a Didikai. Like wise if a Romany
consistently breaks the code he will
be cast out. This type of outcast
is known as a piker. A Romany may
unbend enough to do a Chop with
a Didikai on occasion - they may
even go poaching together - but he
will never deal in any way with a
piker - and for a good reason too;
Didikais are a nuisance at times
but pikers are a menace to Romanies
and house dwellers alike. It is the pikers
who do most of the stealing, car breaking
without disposing of the carcasses etc.
these antisocial activities are the direct
cause of the harsh measures against
gypsies. Our problem will be to get these

three types of gipsy into one association. We will have to find some very good arguments to get the Romanies and the Didikais to patch up their differences. Then we will have to use higher diplomacy to get the Romany-Didikai-Confederation to accept the pikers on certain minimum terms. If we can't get the pikers in - and if we can't convince the pikers after they have got in that they are doing themselves and everybody else a mischief then we will ~~be doing~~ have failed in our main objectives of solving the gipsy problem in Great Britain.

As for the Hedge mumpers (travellers with no Romany blood) - I don't think that gipsies in Great Britain would accept them in their association. The majority of Mumpers would prefer to be housed in any case and we could do them a kindness by campaigning on their behalf.

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The foreign travellers are generally treated with suspicion by most of the English travellers. This is particularly true of Irish tinkers. The only place where I found that English, Scots, Irish, Welsh, Canadian and Roumanian travellers camped happily together was Colney Heath in Hertfordshire before the whole lot was evicted some years ago. There was not even a single row or fight there in the last 14 months that the place was open. Incidentally Barbara Cartland was fighting for those travellers at the time - she has pots of money and may like to be roped in on the Scheme. One of our aims must be to remove the Antiforeign Sentiments that do exist. These Sentiments frankly have to do with the fact that in this overpopulated Country where the number of stopping

Places have been drastically reduced
there are always too many travellers
in one spot. There is no answer
except to find some way of employing
all the travellers in the country
in their own original areas and
to clamour for authorities stopping
places in all the areas where gypsies
live. If this happy state of affairs
~~could be achieved~~ we would have returned
to the original ~~demarcations~~ of 80
years ago & there is no doubt that
the gypsies generally would be pleased
to correspond with their brethren
in Scotland, Ireland & Wales and
possibly meeting up with them at
a great "gypsy fair" in Blackheath
or some such place once in a while.
As to your request for addresses
or even lists I can only give you
very limited help. Most of my contacts

4 in England were in Darent Wood, or
 the A2 and in Gham, Kent, their
 whereabouts at present are better known
 to Brian Richardson than to me. The
 rest were mainly once only acquaintances
 of the Dikhai kind who have a
 habit of giving me their wrong names.
 There is Charlie Scamp in Faversham,
 Kent. I think I could still find
 his house. There is his brother Ted.
 His sister Thelma married George Smith.
 Their address is: Thelma + George Smith
 General Dealers
 (Vandervell's)
 Melton Meadows
 Melton Road
 Woodbridge
 Suffolk
 Semite
 John Stangward
 4 Cheddars Lane
 Newmarket Road
 Cambridge
 (house cleaner; some kind of engineer;
 pure bred Romany poth rot)

Robert Johnson
 27 Maryfield
 London Road
 Edinburgh
 He knows most of the gypsies and
 tinkers in the borders and south
 of the Forth & the Clyde.
 (Just Fred Ramsey
 settled for
 some years
 by but possibly
 on the road
 again by now)

Belle Stewart
~~Walter Wellbank House~~
 near Albyn
 Albyn
 Perthshire were actually born
 in a bar - but
 Scotland father Scots tinker
 of Highland (Maggie)
 Mother a "steward of a house" having
 contact with tent-dwellers Sandy, Maggie
 and Mary Cameron. The Whites, McLeods,
 Higgines and Williams (Hampson)
 and Kellys - long standing friends
 with the Townsleys and the McLeods.

David Stewart 5.
 9 Allander Street
 Possilpark
 Glasgow N.2
 Scotland

Street musician
 from Aberdeen. Travelled
 the whole of England
 Scotland, Ireland and
 Wales. Great friend
 of mine. almost certainly unacceptable
 to gipsy association but one could
 keep him posted anyway.

Mrs. Jean Thompson
 5 Osam Road
 Ferryden
 by Montrose
 Angus
 Scotland

Sister in law
 of Belle Stewart.
 the rest of that
 family is constantly
 on the move.

Frederick Wood
 167 Surrey Hills Caravan Park
 Box Hill Road
 Tadworth
 Surrey

(my very
 best con-
 tact in every respect
 for your scheme. I be-
 lieve he would be an excel-
 lent President for the
 proposed movement but he would take
 a hell of a lot of convincing.

That is all I can do at the present.
See you on the 6th

Yours aye
John.

Greenways
Knockholt
near Sevenoaks
Kent

October 26th., 1966

Dear John,

I got your great letter yesterday and noted down all the names and addresses. We've now got a good bases for the proposed association : the names of a thousand Gypsies and travellers and about 120 postal addresses.

I'm glad that through you we've got some links with travellers in Scotland. We also have someone in Edinburgh who has been very much involved with the campaign in Ireland. He is a teacher called Jock Houston and he belongs to a radical group that is publishing the pamphlet on the situation in Ireland shortly. Perhaps when you go up in January you'll be able to see him.

Don't worry about not finding a place for the November 6th meeting. Brian will be glad to have it down here. It was only that I felt it was rather a long way to ask David Smith to come from Leicester.

How big is the basement room at Cecil Sharp House? I don't think there'll be more than 30 or so people and we don't want to be dwarfed by a huge room. We'll arrange the meeting as informally as possible with everyone sitting around the room, rather than having an elite on a raised dais at one end!

I've asked Vanko Rouda to have the meeting under the auspices of the International Gypsy Committee and, if possible, to come over himself and preside (in as much as we need someone for this). I feel very strongly that we, as liaison workers, have got to play a minimum role once having arranged the meeting and got people there. If Vanko can't come he'll probably send someone else and there is just a chance that Ronald Lee will come over from Canada, as he's written to say he is planning to come this fall anyhow.

Also, he has acquired a duplicator and is ready to start producing a newsletter, "O Glaso Romano." I think it would be the proper thing for us to support his venture and to distribute say 200 copies in Britain and Ireland and to collect what subscriptions we can. We could perhaps ask

supporters, like the members of the Gypsy Lore Society, to buy copies at a higher rate (say 2/6 an issue) as a way of subsidising the movement. I've drawn up a list of such people and we could add to this at our next meeting.

We must still go ahead, of course, with the idea of building up an information centre, as you suggested. At the moment a host of current papers and cuttings are strewn between Brian's files, my files on Ireland and stuff at Richard Hauser's. And then, as you say, we want to collect a small library.

What I hope we'll be able to do - among other things - after discussing all angles on November 6th. is to send out a duplicated circular to all the travellers whose addresses we have and ask them, if they cannot attend in person, to send letters of support. To get any response, however, we'll each have to write covering notes to go to the people we know personally, like your friends in Scotland. I've got three recent letters from Ireland and one from Lancashire indicating continuing contact and support. We'll try to get a good pile for the meeting so that those attending can feel they have many others backing them up.

I hope that Fred Wood will want to come and to play a leading role. Perhaps if you put it to him that this meeting is being called by the International Committee (Vanko Rouda, Stevo Demeter, Antoine Santiago, Mateo Maximoff, Mehmed Sakirovic) and that we are merely acting as liaison workers he will be able to feel that it is a Gypsy affair. Then he has to feel that travellers of all sorts need to unite to save the way of life and get camping sites. I should think that the idea of pressing for United Nation's recognition of the Gypsy people, thus increasing their status, will appeal to him.

Jeff rang up the other day and said he'd had a fairly encouraging response from Gypsy Williams. So we've yet to see what he'll do. Romany Rye will have nothing to do with us or Vanko or anybody, he says quite clearly. On Monday I met a Free Evangelical Church pastor called J.C. Lywood who is well known to Gypsies here in Kent. He's made 300 conversions over the past two years and established two churches with largely Gypsy congregations. He spoke for young Albert Copper in court and got his case dismissed. It was remarkable as Albert was caught by the police in a van loaded with £400 worth of stolen brass from a factory! And had five previous convictions. Lywood simply says he prayed to God. What can you say?

I'm helping Paster Lywood to get in touch with Clement Le Cossec, head of the World Romany Evangelical Church in France and in return (I hope) we may be able to expect some co-operation from him such as having "O Glaso Romano" (sub titled : The Travellers' Voice) on sale at his churches.

Vanko is very concerned about the situation at the large camp at Montreuil where about 3,200 people are living. There is a gradual process of eviction going on and a child has been injured by one of the bulldozers. He wants us to protest to the French authorities (either direct to M. Paon, Prefet de Police, Montreuil, Paris, the Mayors of Montreuil and Rosny-sous-Bois or to the French Embassy in London). I'm sending protest letters and a letter of support to the leader at the camp, Mehmet Bakirovic.

I suppose you will come down here with Donald Kenrick on November 6th. I'll let David Smith know. Can you bring with you a list of the names of other travellers you have met to include in the books.